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NEW RELEASE

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced today that John Cecil McBride, age 58, of Chesapeake, Virginia, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Norfolk, to conspiracy to launder money. He faces a maximum 20 years imprisonment, a fine of \$500,000 and forfeiture of certain real property when sentenced by the Honorable Walter D. Kelley, Jr. on September 13, 2005.

McBride, a co-defendant in an investigation dubbed "Operation Blowfish", was indicted with 30 other co-defendants on January 12, 2005. A federal grand jury in Newport News, Virginia, returned a 324-count indictment, charging the individuals with importing large quantities of controlled substances into the United States; distributing the controlled substances; the laundering of millions of dollars in drug proceeds; and the seizure of substantial financial assets and drugs. On the morning of January 24, 2005, teams of law enforcement officers executed search warrants and arrested the individuals charged in this multimillion-dollar drug ring.

McBride admitted to laundering illegal money for various indicted drug dealers and receiving assistance from other individual defendants in conducting financial transactions to hide the true ownership and source of the money.

United States Attorney McNulty said; "Drug dealers are nowhere without money. McBride engineered the laundering of hundreds of thousands of dollars in drug proceeds by investing dirty money, providing financial services and recruiting others who willingly assisted in these endeavors. We hope his conviction and punishment sends a clear warning to those tempted to provide such services."

The investigation was conducted by the Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Virginia State Police and the Hampton, Henrico, Newport News, Norfolk and Poquoson Police Departments.

Assistant United States Attorney Lisa McKeel is the prosecutor in this case.